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ABSTRACT

This study reports positive impacts of a modified version of the teacher work sample on performance of struggling K-12 readers and on the dispositions of interns who worked with them. The participants included 55 university students in a year-long, senior-level internship and 55 elementary students identified as struggling readers. The intervention occurred over 12 weeks as part of a reading methods class. The intervention was designed by the interns after using a variety of classroom reading assessments to diagnose the areas in which the struggling readers needed help. Struggling reader progress was measured by comparing posttest to pretest scores. Because of the variety of assessment instruments used, only samples of raw data are reported for struggling readers. Interns completed a questionnaire measuring dispositions toward teaching struggling readers before and after the intervention. Disposition data were analyzed using a matched pair t test. Significant changes in dispositions were reported. (Contains 9 references.) (SM)

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TEACHER WORK SAMPLES & STRUGGLING READERS: IMPACTING STUDENT PERFORMANCE & CANDIDATE DISPOSITIONS

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Abstract

This study reports positive impacts of a modified version of the teacher work sample on performance of struggling K-12 readers and on the dispositions of the interns who worked with them. The participants included 55 university students in a yearlong, senior-level internship and 55 elementary students identified as struggling readers. The intervention occurred over 12 weeks as part of a reading methods class. The interventions were designed by the interns after using a variety of classroom reading assessments to diagnose the areas in which the struggling readers needed help. Struggling reader progress was measured by comparing posttest to pretest scores. Because of the variety of assessment instruments used, only samples of raw data are reported for struggling readers. Interns completed a questionnaire measuring dispositions toward teaching struggling readers before and after the intervention. Disposition data were analyzed using a matched pair t test. Significant changes in dispositions ($p < .05$) were reported.

Introduction

Documenting student learning is not new to education; however, in the current context of accountability this documentation has taken on new dimensions. Now policy makers and the general public demand accountability by requiring tests that allege to be able to compare student to student, school to school, district to district, state to state and even country to country. Idaho, like most other states, established performance standards for K-12 students that will be assessed by high stakes exams. The state also passed a reading initiative with requirements for both pre-service and practicing teachers. All elementary, pre-service teacher candidates must pass the Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Assessment on principles and practices of teaching reading before they can be licensed (certified). All teacher candidates in Idaho must also pass technology and content exams. The current standards of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher

Education (2001) require institutions to use data to document that candidates have the dispositions, knowledge, and skills to help all students learn. This documentation is to be organized in an assessment system that can be used for both external review and internal program improvement. The two components of NCATE Standard I that institutions find most challenging to document are candidate dispositions and K-12 student learning.

Of overriding concern for teacher educators and K-12 practitioners is that within this environment, rife with testing, methods of assessment must be found that contribute to, rather than detract from, student learning. Also, it is essential that assessments measure higher levels of learning, not only what is easily measured. The teacher work sample, properly applied, can be instrumental in addressing these challenges.

This paper describes the use of a modified version of the teacher work sample approach to documenting K-6 student learning and changes in candidates' dispositions. During the internship year candidates diagnosed areas of need for a K-6 struggling reader, prescribed intervention lessons and activities, tutored the struggling readers, and documented progress. Candidate dispositions were assessed using a questionnaire before and after the tutoring experience.

Related Literature

A number of researchers found teacher dispositions that were impediments to literacy learning by struggling readers (e.g., Allington & Cunningham, 1996; Walmsley & Allington, 1995). Walmsley and Allington (1995) found a tendency on the part of classroom teachers to excuse themselves from the responsibility for educating low-achieving students. Believing that specialists and separate programs are the solution, there is often a reduced professional accountability by classroom teachers for the progress of struggling readers. Allington and

Cunningham (1996) discovered that the presence of special programs often contributed to teachers' belief they were ill-equipped to teach at-risk readers. Moreover, many teachers did not believe it was possible for a struggling reader to catch up (Allington, 1995).

Approaches to changing dispositions seem to be related to research on changes in attitudes. Zimbardo and Leippe (1991), when discussing the definition of attitude, stated, "...the components are not independent or isolated in different corners of the mind. To the contrary they can be highly interrelated" (p. 32). They went on to explain that outward behaviors, though not the only approach to changing attitudes, can be a powerful attitude change agent. Active involvement seems more powerful than passively receiving information. Chan and Cheng (2001) reported that knowledge and direct experience had a positive impact on the attitude of nurses toward specific groups of patients. This study attempted to document that attitude and content knowledge are the responsibility of the preparation program; traditional assessment methods normally address only content. David Palmer (2001) collected qualitative data documenting factors involved in changing attitudes of elementary candidates toward teaching science. Candidates with negative attitudes toward teaching science became positive about teaching science after taking a one-semester science methods course. Multiple factors were identified as contributing to the change, but no single factor stood out as more important than others. Each of the candidates identified somewhat unique factors as important to their attitude change.

Documenting the impact of teacher education candidates on K-12 students' learning is one way to demonstrate program effectiveness. The Teacher Work Sample Methodology, developed over the past decade at the University of Western Oregon (UWO), can provide this kind evidence.

Elements of the methodology are as follows:

- Sample of work
- Targets for learning
- Measures of learning
- Descriptors of process
- Descriptors of context
- Analyses of learning gains
- Reflection and next steps

(Schalock, Schalock, McConney, Brodsky, & Myton, 2002, pp. 3-4)

The process can be adapted to fit a variety of learning goals and contexts. While this performance assessment is not intended to be the sole indicator of candidate proficiency and program quality, it does provide evidence that the candidate can facilitate learning with K-6 students. In addition, it represents an attempt to improve instruction and learning through the use of assessment.

The studies described above provide suggested ways to address the need to document program quality by assessing K-12 student learning and approaches to changing candidate dispositions related to teaching. The objectives of this study are as follows:

- This study will attempt to document the efficacy of reading methods courses as measured by assessing learning of struggling readers who have been tutored by elementary education candidates.
- This study will attempt to document changes in candidate dispositions toward teaching struggling readers.

Reading Program Description

Elementary education majors at Northwest Nazarene University are required to take three reading courses. The content of the three courses includes the requirements of the Idaho Reading Initiative. During their junior year, elementary education candidates take Fundamentals of Reading and Teaching Reading in the Content Areas. In the third reading course, At-Risk Readers, senior level candidates are equipped with the ability to diagnose literacy needs and accelerate the progress of struggling readers. This course is taken in a condensed time frame in the fall semester of an integrated yearlong internship. The internship provides opportunity for putting reading theory into practice. Candidates work one-to-one with a weak reader in the assigned Professional Development School (PDS) classrooms. Before the reading coursework is completed, each candidate meets with the PDS teacher to identify a struggling reader in need of intensive literacy intervention. Through a teacher work sample process, candidates document their ability to diagnose needs, plan instruction, deliver instruction, and assess progress of a struggling reader.

Method

Subjects

The population for this study included 55 senior-level teacher candidates and 55 K-6 students identified by their classroom teachers as struggling readers. The teachers were elementary education majors at Northwest Nazarene University, a small private liberal arts university located in southwest Idaho. The K-6 students attended public schools that served as PDS sites for the University. These schools serve populations ranging from a largely homogenous, middle-class, suburban to diverse, lower socio-economic groups.

Design and Procedure

During 2000 and 2001 elementary education candidates were given a ten-item questionnaire (see Appendix for instrument) at the beginning of the first semester of the yearlong internship to assess the following dispositions:

- Belief that classroom teacher is responsible to teach struggling readers
- Belief in the efficacy of classroom teachers to teach struggling readers
- Self-efficacy to teach struggling readers
- Responsiveness and persistence in trying to meet the needs of all learners
- Belief that all students can learn.

The responses were recorded on a four point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. For some items the desired response was *strongly agree*; for others the desired response was *strongly disagree*. The same instrument was administered at the end of the study. The most desired responses were was coded as four, second most desired responses were coded as three, third most desired response was coded as two and the least desired response was coded as one. A paired-sample t test was applied to the results ($p \leq .05$).

The intervention was based on a modified version of the UWO Teacher Work Sample model. A key difference was that this process provided evidence of the growth of one student rather than a group of students. Components of these teacher work samples compiled over the course of the semester included:

- Learning-Teaching Context
- Pre-Assessment Profile
- Intervention Plans
- Formative Assessment Notes

- Post-Assessment Profile
- Analysis of Student Learning
- Evaluation and Reflection

Learning-Teaching Context. Prior to working with the K-6 student, the candidate consulted with the PDS teacher and reviewed school records to gain a preliminary understanding of the student. In this section of the teacher work sample, the candidates described the characteristics of the student for whom he/she would provide literacy support. The following information was included:

- Student's name
- Student's gender
- School and grade level
- Classroom teacher
- Description of student's participation in an Extended Year Reading Program or other reading intervention program during school year, if applicable
- Description of other services provided now or in previous years to support learning
- Previous Idaho Reading Indicator (IRI) scores and dates (if available)
- Anecdotal information from classroom teacher about student's reading difficulty
- Candidate's observations of student characteristics prior to intervention
- Classroom characteristics (classroom environment, classroom routines, motivational strategies used by teacher, grouping patterns, other factors within classroom that may impact this student's learning)

Pre-Assessment Profile. During the reading coursework, candidates became skilled in the use of a variety of reading assessments for pinpointing learning needs in phonological awareness, phonics, sight word recognition, fluency, morphological analysis, syllabication, vocabulary, and comprehension. In order to determine the student's literacy strengths and needs, each candidate administered a series of developmentally appropriate pre-assessments most of which were from the Consortium of Reading Excellence (CORE) Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures from Kindergarten through Eighth Grade (1999). The candidate recorded dates and scores on the Pre-Assessment Profile. The candidate, the PDS teacher, and the course instructor analyzed performance on these pre-assessments. Two learning goals were identified based on the student's performance.

Intervention Plans. The teacher work sample included a minimum of 12 lesson plans geared toward the identified learning goals. Each intervention session was approximately 20-30 minutes in length. Candidates averaged two sessions per week with their struggling readers. Each intervention plan included the following:

- Goal(s) being worked on in this lesson
- Information gathered in previous work with the student that determined the need for this lesson
- Instructional strategies, word lists, and plans
- Reflections about successes, challenges, and possible needs in future interventions

Formative Assessment Notes. During the reading coursework, candidates learned about the importance of monitoring growth throughout the instructional sequence through informal measures of student progress. As they worked with struggling readers, they used informal assessments and anecdotal notes to document progress toward meeting the two learning goals.

An ongoing list of intervention activities and results of formative assessments that related to each learning goal was documented as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample of Formative Assessment Notes

Learning goal	Intervention activities	Formative assessment notes
Improve sight word recognition.	1. Dolch Bingo List 1 2. Fishing for Dolch words List 1 3. Spell-Out Strategy List 1 4. I Spy List 1 -- Word Wall 5. 6. 7. 8.	1. 11-15 Dolch sight word check – List 1 22/40 2. 11-22 Dolch sight word check – List 1 27/40 (still having much trouble with where, away, three)

Post-Assessment Profile. Upon completion of the 12 intervention lessons over a three-month period, each candidate administered post-assessments to measure progress in the two goal areas. This provided a summative measure of student performance in the targeted areas.

Analysis of Student Learning. In this section of the teacher work sample, each candidate provided data to demonstrate student learning that occurred during the intervention sequence. After post-assessments were administered and scored, the candidate listed the two learning goals and created a chart to show assessments used and scores and dates for pre-assessments and post-assessments for each learning goal. Using percentages, where possible, the candidate showed learning gains made for each goal. The candidate then made a professional judgment about whether the learning goal was met, partially met, or not met.

Evaluation and Reflection. For the final section of the teacher work sample, candidates wrote a reflective essay in which they evaluated the effectiveness of their teaching practice and its impact on student learning. They wrote to the following prompts:

- To what extent were the learning goals for your intervention sequence met? Provide evidence to support your response.

- What questions or issues does this intervention sequence reveal about your teaching or the student with whom you worked?
- What aspects of your intervention sequence were especially successful or effective? Why?
- How might you teach this intervention sequence differently if you were to do it again? Why?
- What are your recommendations for this student's next steps in literacy instruction?
- Summary of PDS teacher's professional judgment of student's progress in literacy.

Presentation to PDS Faculty

As a follow-up during the second semester, candidates continued to reflect on what they learned about meeting the needs of struggling readers. Working with the faculty member who had guided them through the teacher work sample process, they compared the K-6 work sample data by grade level to show the range of gains for each literacy goal for all of the tutored students. Each candidate identified a research question about working with struggling readers. Books and educational journals were consulted in order to find what research and best practice indicates about that question. Each PDS-based cohort of candidates presented their data and review of literature regarding their research questions to the faculty their PDS site.

Results

The impact of the interventions on student learning was positive for all K-6 subjects in almost all of the literacy goals areas that were addressed by the candidates. Because of the variety of assessment instruments used and the variety of grade levels involved it was not appropriate to apply inferential statistics to the gains. The gains were reported as raw data with percentage

gains. A sample of the data is listed in Table 2. The largest gains were made in sight word recognition, phonological awareness and phonics. The smallest gains were made in comprehension.

In addition to analyzing quantitative data, each candidate met with his/her PDS teacher at the conclusion of the intervention to discuss their informal observations of the subject's literacy progress. A frequent indicator of growth cited in the candidates' Evaluation and Reflection papers was the child's increase in confidence, as indicated by his/her eagerness to participate in reading activities with the class. Suffice to say the gains were important to the students in the sample.

Table 2

Examples of Analyses of Student Learning

Learning Goal	Pre	Date	Post	Date	Gain + or -	Learning Goal
Improve Phonological Awareness ▪ Phonological Awareness Screening Test	15/30 = 50%	9-9-01	22/30 = 73%	12-4-01	+23%	partially met
Improve ability to recognize and blend consonant, short vowel, and long vowel sounds. ▪ CORE Phonics Survey Subtests	33/73 = 45%	9-11-01	59/73 = 80%	12-6-01	+35%	partially met
Improve Sight Word Recognition ▪ Dolch Sight Word Recognition Lists 1, 2	30/92 = 33%	9-11/01	81/92 = 88%	12-6-01	+55%	met

Note. Additional data is available upon request.

Perhaps the most important finding was the positive impact the tutoring experience had on candidate dispositions. Table 3 is from an SPSS output of a paired-sample t test comparing

responses on the questionnaire given prior to the tutoring experience with responses on that same questionnaire given after the tutoring experience.

Table 3

Paired Samples t Test of Items on Candidate Disposition Questionnaire

Item pairs	Mean paired differences	SD	ES of mean	95% Confidence Interval		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Upper	Lower			
PREQ1 - POSTQ1	-.064	.7580	.1022	-.269	.141	-.623	54	.536
PREQ2 - POSTQ2	-.045	.7470	.1007	-.247	.157	-.451	54	.654
PREQ3 - POSTQ3	.055	.8696	.1173	-.181	.290	.465	54	.644
PREQ4 - POSTQ4	-.145	.5153	.0695	-.285	-.006	-2.094	54	.041*
PREQ5 - POSTQ5	-.164	.7641	.1030	-.370	.043	-1.588	54	.118
PREQ6 - POSTQ6	-.727	.7566	.1020	-.932	-.523	-7.129	54	.000**
PREQ7 - POSTQ7	-.182	.6963	.0939	-.370	.006	-1.936	54	.058
PREQ8 - POSTQ8	-.227	.6223	.0839	-.395	-.059	-2.709	54	.009*
PREQ9 - POSTQ9	-.018	.6524	.0880	-.195	.158	-.207	54	.837
PREQ10 - POSTQ10	.027	.7228	.0975	-.168	.223	.280	54	.781

Note. SPSS subtracts the post measure from the pre-measure. Therefore the signs are reversed (i.e., an increase in score from pre-assessment to post-assessment appears with a negative sign and a decrease from pre to post appears as a positive sign).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

Only two items (item 3, item 10) showed a decline in disposition scores; neither decline was significant. Items 4, 6, and 8 showed a significant improvement ($p < .05$) in candidate disposition.

Those items are as follows:

4. It is the responsibility of kindergarten teachers to work with their students who are experiencing difficulty with oral language and concepts about print. (Desired response toward *Strongly Agree*)
6. I am not equipped with instructional strategies for teaching struggling readers to read well. (Desired response toward *Strongly Disagree*)
8. The top priority of teachers in grades 1-3 should be helping struggling readers learn to read well. (Desired response toward *Strongly Agree*)

These responses are indicators of the following dispositions:

Item #4 Belief that classroom teacher is responsible to teach struggling readers.

Item #6 Self-efficacy to teach struggling readers

Item #8 Responsiveness and persistence in trying to meet the needs of all learners

The greatest change was in candidates' belief in their ability to teach readers who struggle. The growing sense of empowerment that candidates experienced is conveyed by the data reported in Table 3; however, it is most powerfully expressed by a candidate's reflection.

> As much as I hate to say it, this work with an at-risk reader made me fearful and uncomfortable at the beginning. It wasn't the course or my student that troubled me, but the lack of confidence I had in myself about the knowledge of this stuff. But working with Jose has been a highlight for me this semester! He showed a passion for learning, which came as a shock to me. From my standpoint, a child who is struggling so much would do anything but enjoy trying to learn. The two intervention goals for Jose were definite necessities. He worked very hard on sight words, phonological awareness, and blending of sounds in reading and writing. The goals for this sequence turned out to be very successfully met. Jose's strongest jump was in his sight word recognition, with a gain of

> 60%! I could see the evidence of this gain and his 48% gain in blending sounds as I listened to him read throughout the intervention sequence. When I first started testing him, he struggled with a page of six words. Last week he read a story to me that had 15-20 words on each page. Now his frustration in reading has changed to excitement and interest! I have conquered that which intimidated me, and I have realized that every child with even the smallest amount of potential can be nurtured and matured. (K. Langley, reflection journal, December 2001)

Discussion

Now in the third year of using this teacher work sample process, faculty have identified the following benefits. First, it is evident that pre-service teachers can positively impact the reading proficiency of struggling K-6 students. Combining coursework with an extended practicum during the internship year is a powerful way to equip pre-service teachers with skills for diagnosing and meeting literacy needs of readers who are experiencing difficulty. By documenting student gains, candidates learn the importance of using data to drive instruction. This experience empowers elementary candidates with abilities necessary for effective reading instruction in their chosen profession, while providing a much-needed safety net for struggling readers in PDS classrooms. By observing where candidates have difficulty in their work with struggling readers, faculty can improve the curriculum and instruction in reading methods courses.

Second, and perhaps most important, the teacher work sample experience has a positive affect on candidate dispositions. While at the outset of the tutoring experience many candidates reported having some of the attitudes and beliefs reported in the literature, their informed and focused work with a struggling reader over the course of a semester changed their outlook. The

data supports that these candidates are entering the profession believing that they are empowered to help all students and learn.

A third insight of faculty involved with this project is that practicing teachers benefit from exposure to current research and practice in reading instruction. At each of the presentations made by candidate cohorts to PDS faculties, teachers voiced appreciation for the current, research-based information and requested that the university continue to hold these follow-up presentations each year. This professional development component of the project serves both candidates and educators in the PDS schools.

In looking ahead, faculty can see the possibility for other research studies related to this teacher work sample process. A longitudinal study of K-6 students who were served by this program could determine if the gains continue. It is important to know whether this series of interventions is the jump-start struggling readers need in order to eventually close the gap with their more successful peers or whether their gains will dwindle away without further intervention. It would also be helpful to compare gains of students who receive one-to-one tutoring with a control group who do not receive tutoring services. What level of training is necessary for tutors to be effective in assisting struggling readers?

The teacher work sample process provides a powerful method of closing the gap for struggling readers while documenting the learning of candidates and their students. Considering the benefits for all concerned, it is important to find other ways to incorporate this type of performance assessment into teacher preparation programs. By demonstrating one aspect of candidates' proficiency through their ability to effect student progress in reading, the institution is partially addressing a requirement of the accountability movement in ways that strengthen, not

impede, student learning. Documenting changes in candidates' dispositions is also an important accountability measure.

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Appendix

Survey of Elementary Preservice Teachers

ID Number: _____ Date:_____

This is an optional, anonymous survey. It is not a requirement of any course and will not affect your grades in any way. It is being used in conjunction with a research study being conducted by Dr. Karen Blacklock. For each statement, place an X in the box that best represents your current beliefs and feelings. Thank you for your helpful information.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Reading specialists, Title I teachers, and special education teachers have more responsibility than regular elementary classroom teachers to teach struggling readers to read well.				
2. It is the responsibility of teachers in grades 1-3 to teach their struggling readers to read well.				
3. It is the responsibility of teachers in grades 4-6 to teach their struggling readers how to read well.				
4. It is the responsibility of kindergarten teachers to work with their students who are experiencing difficulty with oral language and concepts about print.				
5. In general, regular elementary classroom teachers do not have the expertise required to teach struggling readers to read well.				
6. I am not equipped with instructional strategies for teaching struggling readers to read well.				
7. It requires a master's degree in reading or special education to be equipped to teach struggling readers to read well.				
8. The top priority of teachers in grades 1-3 should be helping struggling readers learn to read well.				
9. One of the top priorities of teachers in grades 4-6 should be helping struggling readers learn to read well.				
10. With appropriate instruction it is possible for most struggling readers to "catch up" to grade level in reading proficiency.				

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